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ABSTRACT

Both research about what teachers do that makes a difference in pupil learning and observation of teaching practices give information about what is effective and helpful in teaching reading. Research shows that effective teachers spend more time in task-related activities and less time dealing with matters unrelated to course content. They understand their objectives, are carefully organized, and give close attention to pupils working independently. There is a close association between teacher expectation and pupil learning. Use of interchangeable responses (summary responses made by teachers to pupils' questions or statements) is an effective teaching technique. An anomaly is that effective teachers of low socioeconomic status pupils do not encourage pupils to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, or do anything other than answer narrow questions asked by the teacher. This anomaly indicates that techniques appropriate for one age or group may be inappropriate for another. In observing teachers, it is possible to see that bored teachers produce bored children. Reading aloud, commendation for successful performance, absence of censure for poor performance, and allowing independent reading time are all effective techniques observed in classrooms. (TJ)

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READING TEACHERS I HAVE SEEN

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In this age of accountability all teachers, but particularly reading teachers, are concerned with those teaching methods, materials, and procedures that are likely to produce maximum learning on the part of their pupils. This concern on the part of classroom teachers focuses the spotlight directly on those of us who are involved in teacher preparation, for obviously it is in our domain that teachers are prepared with the necessary skills and teaching techniques that in the light of the best scientific evidence available, have been shown to consistently affect student learning in predictable ways.

I would want to make it perfectly clear at the outset that there are variables other than the teacher variable that have a significant effect on pupil achievement and these dare not be overlooked when considering the issue of accountability. Society has a direct responsibility in providing the funds necessary for effective teaching - buildings, libraries, instructional materials, and the like, and to insure that the environment from which children come in the way of housing, food, recreation, and employment is conducive to learning. The home has a major responsibility to play in pupil achievement in providing an atmosphere and environment

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where learning and achievement are prized commodities, where children grow up in an environment of verbal communication, books, and experiences that provide a base for learning. The school itself - administrators and supervisors must provide the support so necessary for effective teaching in such ways as in-service instruction, guidance for the novice teacher, and classroom research for the more experienced teachers. These peripheral, though extremely important conditions having been met we can then look at what the teacher does - her procedures, practices, and teaching techniques that will be most effective in producing pupil learning. In short, the teacher is only one link in the chain of responsibility that makes for efficient learning.

What I would like to do in the short time that I have available is to outline or overview some of the specific things we do know from research about what teachers do that make a difference in pupil learning, and second, to mention several things that come through observing teachers <u>teach</u> that appear to be practices that contribute to effective learning. Hence, the title of this paper, "Reading Teachers I Have Seen."

Research that is most effective and helpful in providing guides that educators can use in preparing teachers, and throughout I will be referring particularly to reading teachers, is called process-product research. In this

research approach an attempt is made to find the causal relationship between how a teacher behaves and how much pupils learn, based on some criterion measure. In short, it is an attempt to answer the question, "How does the behavior of effective teachers differ from the behavior of ineffective teachers?" Research of this type focuses on specific teacher behaviors such as types of questions used by the teacher as well as the kind of teacher response made to pupil answers, type of seatwork activity, kind of assignments made, small group vs. large group activity, etc. Attention is directed to the specifics of teaching.

Studies in this category have been summarized by Medley (1977), Rosenshine and Furst (1973), and Dunkin and Biddle (1974), and others. For example, from an original list of 289 studies dealing with teaching practices Medley compiled a list of 613 process-product relationships which he summarized in tabular fashion. The majority of these studies dealt with the observations of teachers using a particular practice with their behaviors correlated with pupil gains. In other words, these were correlational studies showing the extent of relationship between the two variables being studied. From these correlations Medley draws several generalizations that have application to reading. The author points out, however, that the generalizations apply largely to pupils of low socio-economic status (SES).

Effective teachers, Medley finds, spend more time in task-related activities and less time dealing with matters unrelated to course content. One could say, then, that effective teachers have a clear understanding of the lesson objectives, they know where they are going, and class time is carefully organized and used so that no irrelevant matters confound their objectives. This would seem to confirm what most of us already believe about the teacher's use of time, but something that teachers frequently overlook.

One conclusion that seems at variance with what we teach is that effective teachers of low SES pupils of grade III or below keep pupil interaction at a low level of complexity. The teacher, Medley says, "... does not encourage pupils to analyze, synthesize, evaluate or indeed do anything but answer narrow questions asked by the teacher." With emphasis on critical reading and acceptance of the fact that reading is a thinking process, it is difficult to accept this generalization. A possible rationalization might be that with young SES children, many having limited experience with verbal exploration, reasoning, and opportunities to express themselves, the teacher should give more time to factual type questions and move into questions of the more elaborative type as pupils have more experience with language and its use. This generalization should not be taken to negate the idea that critical reading should be a goal toward which all

teachers should move.

Another conclusion that Medley draws from his analysis of the process-product studies is that the effective teacher gives close attention to pupils working independently. This would seem to be obvious, but it is an admonition frequently overlooked by teachers, for assignments are made to individuals and small groups with the teacher giving little attention thereafter as to what the pupil is doing or to the problems he may be encountering. Many times, also, the absence of pupil attention is due to large class size. This conclusion would appear to provide a strong argument for smaller class size, teacher aides or both. Regardless, it says clearly that when pupils are assigned independent work, they must be given careful supervision.

Though the majority of studies analyzed by Medley deal with primary pupils of low socio-economic level, he does have evidence born out by other researchers that conclusions drawn from cases of one age or level should not be applied without further study to pupils or students of another age or socio-economic status. In fact in the few studies that involved pupils of high SES Medley found that in a surprising number of instances the ineffective teacher of one group (SES) behaved like the effective teacher in the other. In short, what one learns about children of one age, grade, intelligence, or socio-economic status should not be applied indiscriminately to all other children or groups.

In an excellent monograph by Good, Biddle and Brophy, Teachers Make a Difference (1975), the authors review a number of studies dealing with teacher practices that contribute to effective pupil learning. Of those discussed I shall refer to two. The first is that there is a close association between teacher expectation and pupil learning. The authors write, "In short, when teachers believed that the students could learn and worked hard to see that they did, the students learned; when teachers did not think the students could learn and did not work hard to see that they did, the students did not learn much." (p.66).

Further evidence of this contention is drawn from an article by Kirk and Goon (1975) who summarize studies concerned with unequal schooling as a result of racial segregation. They conclude that "... There is some evidence that teachers tend to direct their teaching to higher-status children, and to spend their time either ignoring or criticizing the lower-status students." The authors continue, "If a teacher teaches only those children who he feels are worth the effort ... then the most pressing concern is to provide every low-income minority child with a teacher who believes the child is worth the effort and who is willing to expend it."

The implications of these statements are profound. A teacher takes great risks in prejuding children on the basis of their past achievement, their intelligence, race,

home environment, and all other factors assumed to contribute to achievement, because at the best they apply only in general to a population. How a given child might achieve is a matter between that child and his teacher. It is in the faith that each has in the other. Each pupil is an individual, a person, and must be dealt with as such.

The second teaching practice that I want to refer to coming from the review by Good, Biddle and Brophy relates to a research conducted by Aspy (1973). This study, I think, has striking implications for reading teachers. Aspy taught a group of teachers to make use of what he called "interchangeable responses." These were summary responses made by the teacher to a pupil's statement or answer to a question by repeating or rephrasing what the pupil had said. Not only did the teacher's "interchangeable response" indicate that the pupil's comments or answer had been heard correctly, but possibly more important to the pupil, that the response had merit, that the ideas were worthy of repetition. A follow-up study by Aspy showed that reading teachers who had been given special training in making interchangeable responses were twice as successful in increasing reading achievement during one summer session than were untrained teachers. But the most striking finding came as a result of a third study which showed that when elementary teachers increased the frequencies of their interchangeable responses, student absences decreased

significantly. I will not vouch for a cause-effect relationship between teacher interchangeable responses and school absences, however.

Now let us depart from the findings of objective research and consider the results of classroom observations of teacher practices - practices having both positive and negative implications. Though such observations may lack the sophistication of carefully conducted correlational or experimental research, they do have the advantage of being validated against what we usually teach in reading methods courses in teacher education.

First, a practice or series of practices that have negative implications. One frequently observes that classroom instruction lacks interest, vitality, color, or motivation. In short, there is an absence of inspired teaching. Teachers seem to be following a formula - children meet in a reading group, new words appearing in the story are introduced, the story is read silently, factual questions about the content are asked by the teacher and answered by the children, the story is reread aloud, new skills are introduced or reintroduced and practiced, workbooks or practice sheet material is assigned, the lesson is terminated and a new group of children assemble. With few variations this is repeated day after day. The teacher shows little enthusiasm for what takes place, and the children show still less. The teacher appears bored and so do the children. The inherent values of reading are

enjoyment and/or new and exciting information but the teacher fails to impart these values either by what is done or said.

Coupled with the above is an apparent over-emphasis on the skills side of reading. This seems to be particularly true today with the emphasis directed to accountability, behavioral objectives, management systems, mastery teaching, etc. One, would have difficulty in denying the concept of accountability and skill mastery, for it is obvious that a teacher needs to have objectives and the means to indicate whether they have been attained. But carried to its illogical conclusion the practice implies that the total act of reading may be broken down into a sequence of clearly defined skills. When a criterion referenced test shows that a given skill is mastered the child progresses to the next higher order skill. If it is not mastered the child returns to the same skill which is practiced until the required level of performance is demonstrated. Even those children who show by their reading behavior that they intuitively possess the skill are taken through the same series of practice exercises so that they will be able to "pass the test."

The major objection and danger of this skills emphasis, it appears to me, is that of fragmenting the reading act into bits and pieces and assuming that when all have been acquired

and the competency test has been passed that the child is a competent reader. What we may have on our hands is a devalued receptacle of skills with the teacher a technician who dispenses them. The fun, the thrill of reading, the vicarious adventure are gone and the residue is as dry as the Sahara on a windy day.

Let there be no doubt about it, there are reading competencies to be acquired, but whatever they are they should be a means to an end rather than the end. The end, the goal, the star in the sky for the reader is not the ability to apply a set of skills, but to enjoy reading or use the information as a result of it. Any skill taught should be taught in relation to the need for that skill in the on-going act of reading. The criterion for reading growth in my book is not the number or degree to which skills are mastered, but to the extent to which children are reading and enjoying reading. How unfortunate if the teacher gets so carried away with skill mastery that the child is lost, because he sees reading as something to master rather than something to enjoy.

Let us turn from a practice that detracts from reading growth and enjoyment to one that has positive implications - a practice that I have seen employed over and over again by enthusiastic and inspiring teachers, and that is of reading or interpreting aloud to pupils or students a selected story, article, or poem. And this practice, by the way, is carried

on by teachers, not only on the beginning reading levels, but on the more advanced junior or senior high school levels. In some cases the teacher reads the opening chapter of a new book as a starter with the children finishing the book on their own, frequently having to await a turn because of the book's sudden popularity. Other teachers on chosen days read a book complete chapter by chapter. Other teachers talk about newly acquired books in the library that they think the children or certain children might enjoy. Still others discuss a book that the teacher is reading for enjoyment or as information.

Such practices as those mentioned add up to one very significant outcome, and that is that reading is seen as an important and interesting activity, equal to if not more important then television viewing. Many are the children in our various cultures who lack the opportunity to experience the values in reading, or to be motivated to expend the energy to learn to read. And regardless of how we phrase it, in sophisticated psychological terms or in everyday, practical language, it is as children and young people are <u>motivated</u> to learn to read, as they see the values inherent in it, that their learning will be effective.

My allotted time has expired. Needing to be mentioned are other observed practices that stimulate and inspire - personalized assistance to children needing help at the time

they need it, commendation for successful performance (and equally important, absence of censure when performance is not so successful), variations in instructional procedures so that the reading period becomes the "fun period" of the day, providing time for independent reading in terms of each child's interests, and many others. They all lend credence to the contention that what the teacher does, does make a difference.

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